

VENETIAN MOSAICS AND THEIR BYZANTINE SOURCES

Report on the Dumbarton Oaks Symposium of 1978

OTTO DEMUS

THE plan to organize a Symposium on "Venetian Mosaics and their Byzantine Sources" originated with the San Marco project. The idea for both the project and the Symposium was conceived a few years ago by Professor William C. Loerke, then Director of Studies at the Center for Byzantine Studies at Dumbarton Oaks. The campaign in Venice began, after preliminary stages, in 1974 and was completed in 1979. It was made possible by a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and by a liberal budget from Dumbarton Oaks. The driving forces of the enterprise were Professor Loerke and Assistant Professor Irina Andreescu, who also acted as field director. The team that worked in San Marco, Torcello, Murano, Trieste, and Ravenna consisted of myself, Dr. Andreescu, and the photographer, E. Ritter of Vienna; temporary collaborators were E. Hawkins for field work, Dr. F. Bonajuto and Sig^{na}. L. Frizziero for archival research, and Dr. R. M. Kloos of Munich for epigraphy; the scaffolds were erected by the firm Ponteggi Dalmine. The work was furthered by the ecclesiastic and secular authorities and the two successive chief architects of San Marco, Ing. Rusconi (†) and Ing. Scattolin, to all of whom our sincere gratitude is due.

The results of the campaigns, which severely taxed the strength of all participants, are being collected in a San Marco archive or Corpus, which will consist of the following: (1) descriptive material; (2) documentary evidence; (3) photographs: large (13.18 cm.) color transparencies; color slides (5.3, 6.6 cm.), especially of technical details; black and white photographs (18.24 cm.).

When complete, this collection may well constitute the most extensive material brought together for a single group of monuments of medieval painting. Further aims of the campaign are the production of two monograph studies, one on the mosaics of San Marco, to follow a monograph dealing with the histo-

ry, architecture, and sculpture of the church, published in 1960 as vol. VI (now out of print) of the Dumbarton Oaks Studies; and the other, by I. Andreescu, on the mosaics of Torcello, Murano, Trieste, and the Basilica Ursiana in Ravenna.

The Symposium, held on May 11 to May 13, 1978, aimed at giving an account of work done and at placing the mosaics of the northern Adriatic in the context of Byzantine and Byzantinizing art. The mosaics, as well as, until some time ago, the sculpture of Venice and its environs, have for a long time been treated as belonging to a kind of no-man's-land, regarded by historians of Western art as Byzantine and by Byzantinists as Western or, at least, contaminated by Western elements. Both views are, in a way, legitimate. In Venice and the northern Adriatic region in general some works are purely Byzantine, some contain Western elements in various degrees, and some are purely Western. In almost all cases we find here Western thoughts which have passed through Byzantine diaphragms of varying density, clad in forms which at the beginning were truly Greek or which at least faithfully imitated Greek work. Soon, however, there began a process of change, not continuous, but with intermissions and variations of speed, a process depending to a great extent on the often rapidly and catastrophically changing relations between Venice and Byzantium.

This relationship was the topic of the first lecture of the Symposium, by Agostino Pertusi, entitled "Venice and Byzantium, 1000 to 1204." Unfortunately, Professor Pertusi fell seriously ill and was unable to present his lecture in person. However, he sent a manuscript which was read in English translation by the Director of Dumbarton Oaks, Professor Giles Constable. After briefly sketching the early history of Venetia and its development from a Byzantine province to an almost, and finally totally, independent duke-

dom, Professor Pertusi highlighted various aspects of the interrelation of the two powers. The first dealt with the political basis of the new cult of St. Mark and his relics, in lieu of the cult of the Byzantine St. Theodore, as an outward sign of the gradual emancipation of Venice from Byzantine sovereignty, and with the importance of the cult of St. Nicholas of Myra and the reputed acquisition of his relics for the assertion of Venetian power in the Adriatic. In the second aspect the strengthening of the economic power in the eastern Mediterranean and its effect on the relationship with Byzantium were described as a process which led from a coincidence to a divergence of interests with the Byzantine Empire, leading up to the *Impresa* of Constantinople in the Fourth Crusade; and, parallel to the development of Venetian policy, the internal evolution from the "ducato" to the *commune Venetiarum*. This process is reflected in the form of the ducal regalia: here, Professor Pertusi is very much on his own ground. Especially interesting for the art historian was the discussion of the history of relics and reliquaries brought from Constantinople in 1204, and, more generally, for the historian of culture, the examination of the problem to what extent the Venetians were acquainted with Byzantine-Greek language and literature. Pertusi's inquiry into the love-hate relationship between Venice and Byzantium was rounded off with an interpretation of the (*post eventum*?) attempts of the Venetians at justifying the diversion of the Fourth Crusade by using Byzantine prophecies about the fall of the city to a "blonde race," thus making the *Impresa* appear preordained.

Professor Pertusi's lecture provided the historical framework for the subsequent art historical talks, which were arranged in two main parts. The first contained lectures in which was characterized some of the material that may have served as models for, or have influenced, the Venetian mosaics; the second part described the impact of those Byzantine influences on mosaic decoration in the north Adriatic. It was not possible, of course, to display the entire range of potential prototypes, but an attempt was made to exemplify the main stylistic currents in the realms of illumination, wall painting, and mosaic. The most keenly felt gap, that relating to By-

zantine icon painting, was eventually closed by a masterly sketch of the leading tendencies in this field in the later twelfth century by Professor Kurt Weitzmann.

In the first talk of the first part, Hugo Buchthal set the pace. He inquired into the "Stylistic Trends in Byzantine Illumination in the Twelfth Century," with flashbacks to the eleventh. Compared with earlier production, that of the twelfth century shows a decisive decline in imaginative quality—with the exception, perhaps, of the court (?) workshop which produced, among others, the Vatican Urbino gr. 2 and the two manuscripts of the Homilies of James of Kokkinobaphos in Paris and the Vatican. To be exempted from this verdict is the ornamental decoration of the manuscripts, which shows an exuberance and technical mastery rarely attained before or afterward. (It is astonishing that monumental painting produced no ornament of equal quality.)

While the first half of the century still represents a fairly homogeneous picture, the second half can only be called chaotic. The provinces emerge somewhat abruptly from obscurity and come prominently into the limelight, while the capital almost vanishes from sight. The animation and explosive dynamism of contemporary wall painting is only hesitatingly taken up, and remains permeated with retrospective tendencies.

Among the various provincial schools (which were treated in greater detail by Mrs. Carr) one small group of exceptional quality stands out, in which the provincial (Palestinian?) tradition of figural painting is combined with the full gamut of the ornamental repertory evolved in Constantinople itself in the second quarter of the twelfth century. The group, obviously the result of a very individual and self-conscious effort, is here attributed to the beginning of the thirteenth century and to Nicaea, the makeshift capital of the Empire during the Latin occupation of Constantinople.

Annemarie Weyl Carr's talk on "Provincial Manuscripts in Later Twelfth-Century Byzantine Illumination" was a supplement to Hugo Buchthal's lecture. Its subject was that famous, or, as Mrs. Carr said herself, "notorious" group of manuscripts which is related to the Rockefeller McCormick New

Testament (Chicago, University Library, cod. 2400). Mrs. Carr's detailed study of these lavishly illustrated manuscripts introduced a new critical approach to these works of the so-called decorative style, without denying the affinity of the various subgroups into which the extensive family can be divided. Mrs. Carr showed that the wholesale localization of the group in Nicaea and its uniform dating to the first half of the thirteenth century does not stand up to close scrutiny, that the tradition of this branch of book production "first becomes visible in the 1150's, becomes especially prolific in the final quarter of the century, and then sees a final burst of vitality in the early thirteenth century, presumably under the aegis of Nicaea. It emerges first as a provincial movement in the most deprecatory sense; later, it pursues a strange course of ascending quality, and by the 1180's is producing books that can be called provincial only in the sense that their conventions cannot be traced back to Constantinople." Where this tradition originated remains obscure. "It must be significant, though, that it was reflected at all stages in Cyprus and Palestine and was available to Nicaea. Thus the testimony of this group is as yet equivocal. It is... clear, however, that manuscript painting, like monumental painting, saw a major expansion of provincial productivity in the later twelfth century. The historical explanation of this expansion remains an important and complex task for the art historian of this era."

The set of problems which was dealt with by Hugo Buchthal and Mrs. Carr with respect to book illumination was also the theme of the lectures given by Doula Mouriki and Susan A. Boyd regarding the realm of wall painting. Mrs. Mouriki surveyed and presented the main stylistic trends in "Wall Painting of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries in Greece," including some of the material in the islands, especially the cycles of the late twelfth century in Cyprus. A statistical analysis of the preserved material leads to the conclusion that in the eleventh century the scene was dominated by "the erection (and decoration) of large monastic establishments which were either imperial foundations or may be attributed to the initiative of the upper classes of local society," while from the

twelfth century (with one exception) "only churches of modest scale have come down to us... usually connected with the initiative of government officials or monastic personalities." In the survey of wall paintings of the eleventh century, the frescoes of the Panaghia ton Chalkeon in Salonica and of the katholikon and crypt of Hosios Lukas played, of course, the chief part. One of the most interesting problems regarding the latter is their relationship to the mosaics of the church; both bodies of wall decoration of the Phocis monastery are dated by Mrs. Mouriki around 1030 to 1040. Other eleventh-century wall paintings in Greece are considered as "representing variations of the style of Hosios Lukas." New features appear in the frescoes of St. Sophia in Ohrid, a comprehensive study of which is still lacking. This is most unfortunate, since some stylistic features of these frescoes may be of great importance for our understanding of the rise of at least one of the currents of twelfth-century painting.

Mrs. Mouriki's survey of twelfth-century wall paintings in Greece began with the fresco decoration of the katholikon of the monastery of the Virgin Kosmosoteira at Pherrai in Thrace, founded in 1152 by the Sebastokrator Isaak Komnenos, "who intended the monastery as his burial place, and composed the typikon himself." The frescoes show the first signs of a lively, late Comnenian style, without belonging as yet to the "dynamic" variety which first appears in a rather special form in Nerezi in 1164. Both decorations reflect, in their most prominent parts, various stages and branches of the Constantinopolitan development, while the style of the frescoes of Djurdjevi Stupovi, dated by a newly discovered inscription to 1171-72, shows already a later and perhaps somewhat more provincial (Salonican?) variety of the storm style which found favorable ground in Macedonia. The two best known monuments of the end of the twelfth century belonging to this specifically Macedonian development are the frescoes of Kurbinovo and H. Anargyroi in Kastoria, with outré forms and frantic movements; a more subdued version is to be found in H. Nikolaos Kasnitzis.

The style of the fresco decorations in central and southern Greece of which Mrs. Mou-

riki showed newly discovered or cleaned and as yet unpublished specimens (H. Hierotheos, Megara) is much closer to the "Art Nouveau" style which can be connected with Constantinople, since typical examples appear in such widely distant places as Staraya Ladoga in northern Russia, Cyprus (H. Neophytos, Lagoudera), and the Peloponnesus (Yeraki, near Sparta).

Neither the storm, nor the so-called Rococo, nor even the "Art Nouveau" style can be regarded as the latest creation of Byzantine painting previous to the *Impresa* of Constantinople in 1204. In the last years of the twelfth century there must have grown up in the capital another style, which has been called the monumental style and which appears in several varieties in Serbia (Studena), Russia (Vladimir), and Greece (Samari, etc.), and in a grandiose synthesis with the storm style in Salonica. The recently discovered frescoes in Hosios David, of the turn of the century, are without doubt the most perfect expression not only of the early monumental style, but, generally, of the highest artistic qualities of Byzantine painting in the period under review. They point forward to the magnificent development of the volume style of the thirteenth century at Mileševo and Sopoćani.

If Mrs. Mouriki gave a bird's-eye view of the various trends dominating the development of Byzantine wall painting in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Susan Boyd concentrated on a single monument of the late eleventh century, the frescoes in the parekklesion of the monastery of Hagios Chrysostomos in Cyprus. This hitherto unpublished work of great quality and high iconographic interest is datable by an inscription, studied and published by Cyril Mango (from whom we expect a monographic study of the monument), which "names as founder a certain Eumathios Philokales . . . who was named governor of the island twice: from 1092 to 1103; and again from 1110 to 1118. . . . On the basis of their style and their relationship to the paintings at Asinou which are dated 1105-6, one may assign them with confidence to Philokales' first term as governor, that is, in the last decade of the eleventh century, and perhaps around the year 1100. . . . The superb quality of the frescoes justifies the assumption that

[Philokales] summoned workmen from Constantinople to carry out the task."

One of the "modern" features stressed by Miss Boyd is the expressive quality of the movements and the psychological involvement of the figures, which can be seen even in the figures of prophets which accompany the scenic representations. The style of these paintings is "perhaps closer to Daphni than to any other monument," although it "is far more dynamic and dramatic" and "looks ahead to the development of the mature Comnenian style."

The echo of these paintings which Miss Boyd traced in six Cypriot churches of the first quarter of the twelfth century provides an object lesson on the problem of the effect of the transplant of a metropolitan style on the art of a provincial milieu. The best opportunity for a close comparison is offered by the *Koimesis* in the two churches of H. Chrysostomos and Asinou; it must lead to a reevaluation of the formerly overrated paintings of the latter.

In the first of her two lectures Irina Andreescu presented a *tour d'horizon* of Byzantine mosaic art in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, excluding the Sicilian material which was reserved for Ernst Kitzinger's talk, and the Greek mosaics in the northern Adriatic which were treated in Miss Andreescu's second lecture. The survey of eleventh- and early twelfth-century mosaics, based on a renewed close study from scaffoldings and lavishly illustrated with newly made color slides which give the impression of seeing these mosaics for the first time, stressed mainly technical aspects and touched upon the problem of patronage wherever possible. It comprised the Zoe and John panels of St. Sophia in Constantinople, with technical comparisons involving the lunette of Leo VI and that of the south vestibule; the mosaic decoration of the Nea Moni of Chios; the grand decoration of Hosios Lukas, which Miss Andreescu dates also to the time of Constantine Monomachos; the mosaics of St. Sophia in Kiev; the mosaics, now lost, of the narthex of the Koimesis church of Nikaia; the Communion of the Apostles from St. Michael in Kiev; the pitiable remains of the same subject from Serres; and, finally, the decoration of the katholikon of Daphni—a formidable array of

monuments, most of which are of the first order of quality and importance. A comparison of contemporary or nearly contemporary works showed that many styles existed side by side at the same time and probably in the same place (especially in the metropolis itself), and that some donors even patronized more than one workshop. By the same token the opposite may also have been the case: several different donors commissioning work from the same shop. To complicate matters, several masters or even workshops certainly were active in one church; cases in point are Chios, Hosios Lukas, and Daphni, that is, every one of the large decorations of the eleventh century. The extent of the division of labor even within one workshop has been shown by Lazarev and his Russian colleagues in dealing with the Kievan mosaics. For the definition of various trends and hands in Hosios Lukas and Daphni Miss Andreescu has laid the groundwork; in this respect Daphni presents greater difficulties than the other cycles on account of the restorations and renovations of the late nineteenth century.

In her second lecture, which began that part of the Symposium dealing with the reception of Byzantine impulses in the Lagoon, Miss Andreescu studied "The Work of Byzantine Mosaicists in Torcello, Ravenna, and Trieste." Some of the results of her studies of the Torcello mosaics have already been published in *DOP*, 26 (1972) and 30 (1976). The Symposium lecture alluded, therefore, only briefly to the archeological, "stratigraphic" aspects of the Torcello mosaics, stressing more the stylistic, compositional, and even iconographic problems. That the main part of all three units still extant in Sta. Maria Assunta is eleventh-century work, restored or patched after a catastrophe in the late twelfth century, is by now well established; for the west wall with the Last Judgment, this work was first done by Miss Andreescu herself. The most archaic looking work is to be found in the south chapel; this does not mean that the mosaics of the south apse and the contiguous vault are earlier than the apostles of the main apse, but they reflect, at least in part, Early Byzantine work in San Vitale in Ravenna. This is why they were dated by a number of authors to the

seventh or eighth century. They are, however, stylistically and technically typical of the eleventh century, and related (though set by different hands) to the apostles of the main apse. The latter, in their turn, are connected with one of the main streams of the Greek development which has found its best known expression in Hosios Lukas. From the point of view of the Byzantine development, the eleventh-century mosaic of the west wall is the most modern part, stylistically speaking, of the three main groups; "it combines the most advanced [tendencies] of the static, hieratic Hosios Lukas tradition with a neo-classic vision."

The second of the monuments studied by Miss Andreescu, the former apse mosaics of the Basilica Ursiana in Ravenna, created in 1112 and destroyed in the eighteenth century, is known only through an engraving of 1741 and six extant fragments: one full figure of the Virgin and five heads. The majority of these fragments belong stylistically and technically to a current which, though certainly Greek, had for some time been at home in the north Adriatic; their style is an offshoot of the workshop that was active in the main apse of San Marco. The rest seem to be the work of a master connected with the neo-classical currents of Greece. The Ravenna mosaics are most important on two grounds: they are the only mosaics in the northern Adriatic which are firmly dated, and they show a most intricate and interesting program, a combination of strictly local, Adriatic, and Byzantine motifs and ideas.

Byzantine and Western elements combined also to form the iconography and the compositions of the two apses in Trieste Cathedral, works of Greek mosaicists who drew also on the work of their predecessors in the Lagoon; there is a certain concordance in the vocabulary of these and the Venetian and Ravenna mosaics.

Much has already been done to unravel the complicated web of the stylistic relationships both within the north Adriatic cycle and between it and the Byzantine sources. Still, there are yet a number of problems which will have to be solved, or be shelved as insoluble with our present knowledge. This regards also San Marco, the numerous problems of which were adumbrated in two talks by

the writer of this report. Since it is hoped that the first volume of the monograph on the Marcan mosaics up to 1200 will be published at the same time as, or not too long after, this report, I propose to be very brief here.

There is a close connection between San Marco and Torcello, both in the earliest stages and in the late twelfth century: in both periods the two great churches shared the same or at least closely related workshops. In San Marco the beginnings are Byzantine, and to a large extent also the first plans and programs. In the course of the twelfth century both programs and style became increasingly "Westernized," with local workshops taking over when the relations with Byzantium became strained. However, the iconographic (compositional) models remained Byzantine, with few exceptions, and eventually style and technique of the mosaics came again under the dominating influence of Byzantine monumental art. At the time of the great renewals in the last quarter of the twelfth century the Venetian mosaicists were again *au courant* with regard to the Byzantine development, embodying in their work (which is of the highest artistic quality) impulses from a number of Byzantine currents, often side by side. Thus, we find in the central section (central dome, west arch, and Martyria of the Apostles) the storm variety of the dynamic style next to, and in certain mosaics even combined with, "Art Nouveau" trends and the abstract decorative style, and even the first intimations of the last of the Byzantine styles of the twelfth century, the monumental style.

This multiplicity of styles and trends is not necessarily characteristic of the colonial sphere of Byzantine art. That the situation can be different has been shown by Ernst Kitzinger in his concluding talk, "A Commentary: Venice and Sicily as Two Colonial Centers of Greek Mosaic Art." The comparison is made especially interesting by "the basic fact that from . . . essentially similar premises there emerged [in the two regions] monuments that are in many ways very different." One of the local factors which produced these differences was the architectural settings—basilicas and the five-domed free-cross building of San Marco in the north, a Byzantine cross-in-square church (Martorana), a combination

of the latter with a basilican nave (Cappella Palatina), a Norman cathedral (Cefalù), and, finally, a synthesis of Byzantine and Western architectural systems (Monreale) in Sicily. This diversity alone must have produced entirely different attitudes toward mosaic decoration in the two centers. The political and historical conditions were another factor. "In matching Constantinople's venerable shrine of the Apostles with its own Apostoleion the rising Venetian Republic proclaimed monumentally its link with the Apostolic Age. The Norman Kings of Sicily felt no need to underpin their aspirations in this way. The sources and models of their architecture were wholly contemporary; drawing on the extraordinarily varied artistic resources that were within their reach—and temporarily fusing them—they created a dynastic art of their own. The challenge to Byzantium is more direct and more open here."

The monarchic factor shows itself in Sicily, not only in the representation of the ruler associated with the deity, as in Byzantium (for which there is no counterpart in Venice), and in the program and arrangement of the mosaic decor in the churches, especially the Palatine Chapel, but also in the use of mosaic for decorating the royal residences. The technique was introduced in the later years of Roger II's rule, and was in use to about 1190. Its "flowering . . . in Sicily was sustained throughout by the importation of artists from Byzantium"; there was no local school such as Venice generated from time to time: "If rivalry with Byzantium was a primary motivation it was important to maintain Byzantine standards of craftsmanship and to stay at the height of Byzantine fashions. . . . Three distinct teams or workshops must have been imported in the course of the fifth decade of the century," so that we have here "an extraordinarily revealing cross-section of Byzantine mosaic art in a single decade." After an elusive intermediary phase in the 1150's and 1160's, in which there appears "little indication of the storm to come, the dynamic style of the 1170's and 1180's," the mosaics of Monreale represent a new departure, "the result of a new Byzantine intrusion rather than a local development." Stylistic parallels with the "central workshop" of San Marco abound. There is, however, no direct contact

between the two decorations, nor is there any indication in Sicily of the development which in Venice turns the dynamic style into the expressive mannerism so characteristic of the mosaics of San Marco's west arch. "The strength of the art of Monreale lies elsewhere. There is little empathy there, or moral involvement with the subjects depicted. Instead, there is a great deal of swift action and movement. This movement is communicated from figure to figure, from scene to scene, and encompasses the huge expanses of wall in their entirety. In the design of these mosaics their relation to one another and their overall effect in relation to the architecture played a

large, indeed, a fundamental role. Here was a vast interior space decorated in a single, fast operation according to a unified architectural concept." Compared with this, the mosaics of San Marco give the impression less of a homogeneous whole than of an almost haphazard conglomeration of the works of different workshops and artists, and this is true even of those parts which were made at the same time. If this is a defect, it is one which makes the Venetian church (and with it, all the other mosaic decorations in the Lagoon) even more interesting for the historian of Byzantine painting and its "fortune" in the West.